

House Foreign Affairs Committee  
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

Hearing  
on  
Counter-Terrorism and Human Rights: Striking the Right Balance

October 26, 2021

QUESTION FOR THE RECORD

*Question submitted by Co-Chair James P. McGovern:*

You have broad experience with counter-terrorism efforts in a number of country contexts, including in Iraq. How did your experience in Iraq shape your views of effective counter-terrorism strategies?

*Response submitted by Tom Parker, Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Officer, Terrorism Prevention Branch, U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime:*

In Iraq, working for the British government, I experienced firsthand how, having been initially greeted with some hope and open minds, we collectively managed to alienate Iraqi civilians, both because of our lack of sensitivity to local culture and our abrasive approach to force protection. Obviously, there were other forces at work, but our behavior as outsiders played right into their narrative. I was lucky enough to have the opportunity when I returned home to the US to reflect on the experience during a six-month fellowship at Yale University. I started to look at previous historical counterterrorism and counterinsurgency campaigns to tease out potential parallels, and it quickly became clear to me that there was an established pattern, that in conflict after conflict democratic states departed from their established norms and institutions, often in an attempt to appear strong, but in doing only made things worse. When I started to research this dynamic in more depth, I found that this was also precisely the response that terrorist groups like AQI had been hoping for.